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JRNL 270.01: Reporting the News

Nadia D. White

University of Montana, Missoula, nadia.white@umontana.edu

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JRNL 270/Reporting the News/ CRN 30509

Instructor: Nadia White

Twitter: @NadiaWh

Instagram: NadiaWhiteMT

Phone/email: 243-2227, nadia.white@umontana.edu

Class meeting time: 11 a.m.-12:20 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday

Class meeting place: DAH 210

Office hours: Monday 2– 4 p.m, Thursday 2 – 4 p.m. Or by appointment

Optional Textbook: The Missouri Group, News Reporting and Writing, 11th edition or later

Midterm writing evaluation: Thursday, March 9

No-class Holiday(s) this semester: Spring Break, March 21-25

Final writing evaluation: Friday, May 13, 8 a.m.

Last class: Thursday, May. 5

Course description

Building on what you've learned in JRNL170, this course will expand your ability to report accurate and timely news for an online audience, writing for both the ear (audio reporting) and the printed word. In this class you will bolster your news writing and news judgment skills; Improve your ability to identify, research and pitch potential news stories; identify and interview credible sources. Please note, JRNL170 (News Writing) or the equivalent transfer credit is a prerequisite for this class. If you do not have the prerequisite, please let me know and I'll help you get into JRNL170.

Learning outcomes

Successful students will demonstrate their understanding of the values of truth, accuracy and fairness in news reporting and of the importance of meeting the needs of diverse audiences. They will show their ability to:

- Think critically and independently.
- Research and evaluate information.
- Critically evaluate and tailor their work to the appropriate audience.
- Write correctly and clearly for both audio and print audiences.
- Apply basic numerical concepts.
- Produce news stories on deadline.

Because **this is an approved intermediate writing course**, all students will write stories appropriate for a given audience and purpose. They will form and express ideas in writing, use writing to learn and synthesize new concepts, revise written work based on

constructive feedback, begin to use journalistic writing conventions (AP style, story forms for different platforms) and demonstrate appropriate English usage.

As part of the University-wide Program-level Writing Assessment, this course requires an electronic submission (via Moodle) of an assignment stripped of your personal information to be used for educational research and assessment of the university's writing program. Your paper will be stored in a database. A random selection of papers will be assessed by a group of faculty and staff using a rubric developed from the following Writing Learning Outcomes. The [rubric](http://www.umt.edu/facultysenate/committees/writing_committee/UPWA.php) that will be used to score the papers can be found here: http://www.umt.edu/facultysenate/committees/writing_committee/UPWA.php

How this class works: The COVID-19 edition

Just like any other year, you'll learn by doing, and I'll gauge your progress with frequent exercises and quizzes that build toward each writing assignment. Once the semester gets going, each week will feature an exercise or quiz that builds on previous class discussions, so it is crucial that you attend every class and participate in class conversations.

From the start, you'll be reporting, writing and submitting stories that involve real events and real sources. These stories will be based on assignments from me or from your ideas that I've approved in advance. We'll do some team reporting, but you'll be working individually on most assignments.

At first, you'll focus on writing that will be read, then we'll add in writing for the ear – writing that will be heard. Around Week 9, we'll switch to emphasize writing for broadcast. You will have improved your reporting chops by then and you'll use those skills to report a story for a radio or podcast audience.

We'll use a class blog for sharing stories and discussing and critiquing issues confronting the press and our class.

Just like reporters around the world, you will gather information in ways that protect you and your sources from possible COVID 19 infection. That means you will be reporting on the phone a lot, being creative in how you gather observations for stories. You will also need to develop a heightened awareness of COVID risk. Professional reporters all over the world have been working with COVID for the last year – working from home, reporting with masks on, asking sources to describe the surroundings a journalist cannot see. Part of their job -- and yours -- is to manage the risk of infection while remaining healthy. I ask that you all be leaders in campus in demonstrating smart lifestyle and work choices. Have important conversations with your friends and roommates about keeping your dorm rooms and apartments safe spaces. Those spaces are only safe for you as long as you and your roommates take precautions seriously. The best way to avoid getting sick with COVID or infecting others is to be vaccinated and wear a mask in shared spaces. If you see people who are not wearing masks or are otherwise engaging in behavior that increases the chances of community spread avoid them or ask them to take precautions. I

would like this class to meet in person. I think I teach and you learn better that way. Our time together really depends on all of us establishing and enforcing safer community norms. There will never be no risk. Let's make there be manageable risk.

COVID-19 Mitigation and Best Practices for Don Anderson Hall

- ☐ Mask use is required within the classroom and all of Don Anderson Hall is required.
- ☐ If you feel sick and/or are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, please let me know in advance, and don't come to class. Contact Curry Health Center at (406) 243-4330.
- ☐ Mask use is required when reporting in person or in vehicles when traveling to do your reporting if other people are or will be in the vehicle.
- ☐ If you are required to isolate or quarantine, you will receive support in the class to ensure continued academic progress.
- ☐ UM recommends students get the COVID-19 vaccine. Please direct your questions or concerns about vaccines to Curry Health Center.
- ☐ Drinking liquids and eating food is discouraged within the classroom.

Truth, accuracy & personal responsibility

This is a foundational journalism class. These are interesting times to understand the potential, practice and potent threats to effective journalism. Facts matter. Trust matters. Integrity matters. Every journalist – even journalism students -- has the opportunity to shape how the rest of the world views journalism. To that end, this class will pay attention to the world of journalism generally and to ethics and professionalism, specifically and personally. We'll pay attention to how you present yourself to the world in the course of doing your work as a journalist. We'll practice phone interviews, in-person interviews and the general knack for getting along with other people. I hope you will be interviewing strangers for your stories. It will be empowering, challenging, fun and rewarding.

Everyone in this class should become a news junky if you aren't already. You should read, watch and/or listen to a variety of news sources every day. Choose several, such as:

- ☐ Missoulian, Montana Free Press, Missoula Current
- ☐ Montana Kaimin
- ☐ A major city newspaper (NYT, WaPo, LAT, Seattle Times etc.)
- ☐ Local TV: KECI, KPAX etc.
- ☐ Nightline on PBS
- ☐ Public Radio: MTPR

Quizzes and exams

There will be AP Style, grammar and current events quizzes.

There will be a midterm on Tuesday, March 8, and a final writing assessment due Friday, May. 13.

Attendance and deadline policy

This is a professional school, and professionals hit deadlines. Even so, I realize that stories can fall apart for reasons beyond a reporter's control (situations change, sources bail out, etc.) If that seems to be happening, you must tell me about it **well before** the deadline so we can shift to a different story or deadline. I won't have much sympathy for excuses that come after deadline.

You may not make up any exercise, quiz or writing assignment that you miss without prior notice and instructor approval.

Any assignment turned in after deadline will be marked down one letter-grade step for each 12 hours or portion thereof that it is late. For example, *if a story that is due at midnight is turned in at 12:30 a.m., your B story becomes a B-. If you still haven't turned it by noon, it becomes a C+, and so on.* An assignment or story that is not turned in at all earns a 0. Stories that are more than a week late may not be submitted for credit.

If you miss more than 1/3 of the classes (10) **for any reason** you will receive a failing grade.

Writing assignments

This course will feature shorter writing assignments (Briefs: Pitches, news briefs, social media posts, worksheets,) and more substantial pieces (News Stories: breaking news stories, first and second drafts of feature or full-reported pieces.) Three of these assignments will be revised.

Each New Story must have:

- ☐ ☐ A slug, in this format:
 - *LastName_Slug_Datecode*, eg. White_Instructions_012322
- ☐ a headline, byline and text for social media.
- ☐ Source audit and contact information (name, phone number and/or email) for sources you quote, at the end of the story. General demographic description for each source you talk to, quoted or not.

News Story assignments will include the following. Due dates and details will be included on a separate calendar and are subject to change:

Story based on coverage of a news conference.

Goal: To brush up your news judgment, note-taking and news writing. The writing needs to be accurate, clear and in proper print news style.

Diversity: Campus news story

Goal: To practice talking to people with life experiences that are not like yours and to practice writing a simple feature story.

Breaking news stories

Goal: To practice seeing and pursuing news stories as they happen. These 500-700 word stories can be turned in at any time. They should focus on a timely occurrence that is NOT a scheduled event. (Due as it happens, no later than April 15.)

Feature preview story about an upcoming live, local event^R.

Goal: To improve your skills reporting for background context, meaning, covering a live event announcement.

Story about that same live, local event.

Goal: To show you how to report accurately and interestingly on deadline. You'll get to use the context you gathered in the previous assignment.

Document story: Cops and Courts briefs.^R

Goal: To introduce you report precisely on a specialized beat, one that requires you to consider a data-based trend as well as to translate legal language and avoid legal and ethical pitfalls.

A Pitch^R

Goal: To introduce you to the art of persuading an editor to publish a story, in this case a profile. To do that, you'll need to do some pre-reporting to find the story's premise and what makes it interesting. You'll also have to nail down human and documentary sources. (This pitch counts as a News Story.)

Radio feature package (script, audio and photo)

Goal: To build on your skills in producing an audio story. You'll pitch a story and then gathering audio interviews and natural sound, write a script, and edit the audio package for broadcasts.

Data and dollars

Goal: To explore the stories revealed when we put data and financial information in the spotlight.

* Story will be revised

Grading

10% Attendance & Participation
20% Exercises, Participation, Quizzes, Worksheets etc
20% Briefs, Revisions etc. (pitches, news briefs, social media posts, revised stories)
50% News Stories (breaking news stories, first and second drafts of feature or full-reported pieces, print or audio)

Grades will be based on a scale of 100 percent and will use the University of Montana's plus/minus system. Your final grade will be given as a letter grade, but I'll be using numerical grades throughout the course. The equivalents are as follows:

| | | | |
|----|--------|----|----------|
| A | 95-100 | C+ | 77-79 |
| A- | 90-94 | C | 73-76 |
| B+ | 87-89 | C- | 70-72 |
| B | 83-86 | D | 69-60 |
| B- | 80-82 | F | Below 60 |

Building access

Your Griz Card will gain you access to DAH and rooms with computers. Feel free to work on your stories here.

Additional requirements

Academic honesty: Misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the university. Students need to be familiar with the [Student Conduct Code](#).

Cell phones and laptops in class

We may end up using cell phones or laptops for all sorts of things in class, but I ask that you do not use your laptop or phone for non-class stuff while in class.

I strongly recommend that you avoid using them for note taking as well. Evidence strongly suggests that [students who take notes longhand remember the material better and apply it more effectively](#). Moreover, it is hard for me to teach when you are distracted by a screen right in front of you. Or by the screen of the student sitting in the row ahead of you. Journalists need to be able to pay attention to the person they are engaging with, so, this is part of learning by doing. Equally important, the dynamics of the class really suffer when some students are engaged with their screens and not the dialog developing in class. I reserve the right to turn off your laptop and take possession of your cell phone if you cannot manage your use of those devices appropriately.

No double dipping

You may not submit for this course any assignment that has previously or will be concurrently submitted for another class unless you receive prior approval from the professor of this course. Doing so without permission will result in an F for the assignment, and could result in an F for the course.

Accommodation for students with disabilities:

This course is accessible to otherwise qualified students with disabilities. To request reasonable program modifications, please consult with the instructor. [Disability Services for Students](#) will assist the instructor and student in the accommodation process.

***** This syllabus, like news, and life itself, is subject to change*****